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ABSTRACT

Substantial emphasis has been placed on Florida Extension faculty evaluating their educational programs for impact and the utilization of these data for program accountability, yet little is known of the extent to which the faculty have accepted this responsibility. In order to assess the stage of adoption of impact evaluation as a practice, and the use of data obtained, a random sample of 100 County Extension faculty were surveyed. Fifty-seven percent reported evaluating one or more programs for impact, and planned to continue to do so whenever appropriate. Eleven percent had done an impact evaluation, but were undecided about trying another one. Three percent had done an impact evaluation and indicated rejection of doing so in the future. The remaining 29 percent indicated that they had not rejected the concept but were at earlier stages of the adoption process. Of those adopting impact evaluation, 97 percent had assessed impact at the practice change or end results level. Home Economics Agents led in adoption of impact evaluation as a process, followed by agricultural agents and 4-H agents. Of those adopting impact evaluation, 71 percent reported utilizing the data for accountability purposes, with the primary audience being Extension Advisory Committees. Only 38 percent had used the data with county officials. County Extension Directors reported making greatest use of the data in accountability. The Questionnaire on the Importance and Use of Impact Evaluations is appended. (JAZ)

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What We Have Learned About Extension Faculty Adoption of Evaluation as a Basis for Program Accountability

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Introduction

The Florida Cooperative Extension Service, like other state Extension organizations, is facing increasing demands from funding bodies and other stakeholders for program accountability. Over the past several years, the Florida Cooperative Extension Service has encouraged the conduct of formal evaluations of program impact at both county and state levels as a means of responding to accountability demands, as well as a means of strengthening the quality of ongoing and future educational programs. Florida Extension's investment in faculty training in evaluation and accountability techniques has been substantial. This training has been essentially provided by the Extension Program Evaluation and Organizational Development Unit, both as an integral part of a required new-agent orientation program, and as a component of ongoing staff development activities.

Although a high percentage of present field faculty have participated in evalution training programs, little is known about where faculty members are in their acceptance of impact evaluation as a practice, the degree to which they have tried their hand at conducting formal evaluations of program impact, or their utilization of such findings in formal accountability efforts. This study assesses Florida Extension field faculty acceptance of formal impact evaluation as a part of their programming process, and their utilization of impact evaluation findings for formal external accountability purposes. The adoption model of Rogers and Shoemaker (1971) and the impact assessment model developed by Bennett (1976) were utilized as basic frameworks for the study.

Methodology

One hundred field faculty were randomly selected to receive a mail questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of 12 multiple response items assessing stage of adoption of formal impact evalution as a practice, levels of evidence being collected by those carrying out impact assessments, stage of adoption of the practice of utilizing impact

evaluation data in formal accountability to external audiences, the external audiences with whom information is being used in accountability, and selected demographic characteristics of the respondents. In order to maintain anonymity of response, no system for follow-up with non-respondents was used. As of the time of writing this report, 70 questionnaires had been returned (70% response rate), of which 67 were deemed usable.

Profile of Respondents

Demographic data were collected for title, technical field, length of employment, rural/urban nature of county, and size of county population. Data as to previous training in evaluation techniques were also collected.

Title

Thirty-two percent of the respondents reported having the title of County Director, 29 percent the title of County Program Leader or Coordinator, and 39 percent the title of County Extension Agent.

Technical Field

Agriculture was the technical field indicated by 36 percent of the respondents, 34 percent indicated home economics, 24 percent indicated 4-H, and 6 percent indicated marine or "other".

Length of Employment

Forty-nine percent of the respondents indicated having been employed in Florida Extension over 10 years. Twenty-seven percent indicated having been employed from 4 to 10 years, and 24 percent indicated less than 4 years.

Rural/Urban Nature of the County

Thirty-five percent of the respondents indicated their county to be largely rural, 42 percent largely urban, and 23 percent about equal rural/urban.

County Population

Eighteen percent indicated their county to be under 25,000 in population, 26 percent between 25,000 and 99,999, 14 percent between 100,000 and 250,000, and 42 percent indicated their county to be over 250,000 in population.

Training in Evaluation

Eighty-eight percent of the respondents indicated having had training in evaluation. Of these, 57 percent indicated having received training within the past 3 years.

Adoption of Formal Impact Evaluation as a Practice

The first questionnaire item attempted to assess the stage of adoption of the respondents relative to the practice of conducting impact evaluations. Seven statements were developed to assess the five stages of adoption as described by Rogers and Shoemaker (1971). One statement each was developed for the awareness, interest, and adoption stages, and two statements were developed for each of the remaining stages, evaluation and trial (Appendix A).

Of 65 respondents, 37 (57%) indicated adoption of impact evaluation, checking the statement, "I am evaluating my programs for impact whenever appropriate. I plan to continue to do formal evaluations as I have found the results to be beneficial". The remainder had either not done any formal evaluations of program impact (29%), had done one or more evaluations but were still undecided about continuing (11%), or had decided not to continue due to little perceived benefit (3%). Stages of the adoption process and number and percent of respondents indicating each relative to their position with regard to formal impact evaluation are indicated in Table 1.

Table 1: Stages of Adoption Process Relative to the Practice of Formal Impact Evaluation, Number and Percent of Respondents in Each.

Stage		Number and Percent of Respondents
Awareness		1 (2%)
Interest		8 (12%)
Evaluation		10 (15%)
Still Undecided	6 (9%)	
Rejected	4 (6%)	
Trial		9 (14%)
Undecided	7 (11%)	
Rejected	2 (3%)	
Adoption		37 (57%)

Those respondents indicating having carried out one or more formal assessments of program impact were asked to indicate levels of evidence sought according to the upper four levels of Bennett's model (Appendix A). As indicated in Table 2, 60% had assessed general reactions, 69% of the respondents had assessed change in knowledge, skills, or attitudes, 62% had assessed practice change, and 35% had assessed program consequences (end results).

Table 2: Levels of Evidence Assessed (multiple response item)

Level	Number and Percent of Respondents
Reactions to Program	39 (60%)
Change in Knowledge, Skills, Attitudes	45 (69%)
Practice Change	40 (62%)
Social or Economic Impact (consequences)	23 (35%)

The number of formal impact evaluations reported implemented during the past two years ranged from 1 to 10, with a mean of 4.5. Fifty percent of the respondents indicated doing a greater number of impact evaluations in the past two years as compared to previous years, 30 percent indicated doing about the same number as in previous years, and 20 percent indicated doing less. Based on responses to demographic variables, the following characteristics were noted relative to those indicating having adopted formal impact evaluation as a practice:

1. For those within each title, the percent having adopted varies as follows: County Extension Directors (57%); County Extension Program Leaders/Coordinators (63%); and County Extension Agents (50%).
2. The percent having adopted varied by technical area identified, with those identifying with Home Economics leading in adoption (83%), followed by those identifying with agriculture (46%), and those identifying with 4-H (31%).

*3. The percent adopting also varied for years in Florida Extension with those within the over 10 years of service category leading in adoption (64%), followed by those within the 4-10 years category (61%), those within the 1-3 years service category (33%), and those indicating less than 1 year of service (25%).

4. Of those reporting having had training in evaluation, 63% indicated adoption of formal impact evaluation as a practice. Of those having had no training, only 1 (17%) indicated adoption.

*5. The percent of respondents adopting by rural/urban counties varied, with 67 percent of those in largely urban counties adopting formal impact evaluation as a practice, followed by those from about equal rural/urban counties (53%), and those from largely rural counties (43%).

*6. The percent respondents having adopted found impact evaluation as a practice varied directly with county population, with 68 percent of those in counties above 250,000 population adopting, 67% of those in counties of 100,000 to

250,000 population having adopted, 47% of those in counties 25,000 to 99,999 population having adopted and 25 percent of those in counties of less than 25,000 population having adopted.

* Statistically significant association at .05 level of confidence.

Adoption of the Practice of Utilizing Impact Evaluation Results in Program Accountability

In an attempt to assess the stage of adoption of the respondents relative to their use of impact evaluation results in formal external accountability, seven statements were again developed to assess the five stages of adoption. One statement each was developed for the awareness, interest, and adoption stages, with two statements each for the evaluation and trial stages (Appendix A).

Of 47 respondents to this item, 34 (71%) indicated adoption of the practice of utilizing impact evaluation results for formal external accountability purposes, i.e., "I use evaluation results in my accountability efforts whenever appropriate and feel that it is valuable and beneficial". The remainder had either not used evaluation results in accountability (14%), had done so one or more times but were undecided about continuing (13%), or had decided to discontinue because of little perceived benefit (2%). The number and percent reporting each adoption stage are indicated in Table 3.

Table 3: **Stages of Adoption Relative to Utilization of Impact Evaluation Data in Formal Accountability to External Audiences, Number and Percent of Respondents in Each.**

Stage		Number and Percent of Respondents
Awareness		2 (4%)
Interest		4 (8%)
Evaluation		1 (2%)
Still Undecided	1 (2%)	
Rejected	___	
Trial		7 (15%)
Still Undecided	6 (13%)	
Rejected	1 (2%)	
Adoption		34 (71%)

Respondents indicating having utilized impact evaluation data in formal accountability were asked to indicate audiences with whom used. Responses were as follows (Table 4).

Table 4: External Audiences With Which Impact Evaluation Findings Utilized in Formal Accountability

Extension Advisory Committee(s)	37 (77%)
County Administrator or Manager	16 (33%)
County Commission	18 (38%)
Reports to Specific Clients	20 (42%)
General Reports to The Public	19 (40%)

Utilizing responses to demographic variables, the following relationships were noted relative to those indicating having adopted the use of formal impact evaluation findings for formal external accountability purposes.

1. The percent adopting within each job title varied, with 80 percent of the County Extension Directors adopting , 64 percent of the Program Leaders/Coordinators, and 52 percent of the County Extension Agents having adopted the practice.

2. The percent adopting within each technical area also varied, with 60 percent of those in agriculture adopting, 80 percent of those in Home Economics adopting, and 50 percent of those in 4-H adopting.

*3. The percent adopting by years in Florida Extension also varied, with 76 percent of those with over 10 years adopting, 69 percent of those with 4-10 years adopting, and 40 percent of those with less than 4 years adopting.

4. Of those indicating having had training in evaluation, 67 percent indicated the use of impact evaluation information in formal accountability. Of those having no training, only 1 (33%) indicated utilizing evaluation information for formal accountability purposes.

5. The percent respondents adopting by rural/urban nature of county varied, with 76 percent of urban respondents adopting, 62 percent of rural respondents, and 58 percent of about equal rural/urban mix adopting.

*6. The percent respondents adopting within population categories varied also, with 72 percent of those from counties above 250,000 adopting, 71 percent of those from counties 100,000 to 250,000, 67 percent of those in counties of 25,000 to 999,999 population, and 50 percent in counties less than 25,000 population.

* Statistically significant association at .05 level of confidence.

Summary

In summary, it would appear that a substantial number of Florida field faculty have progressed through the stages of the adoption model to the adoption stage with regard to

the practice of formal evaluation of programs for impact. Of these, it would also appear that a substantial number utilize impact evaluation results in formal accountability to external audiences. It would appear that the practice of formally evaluating Extension programs for impact is somewhat a function of technical area, years of experience, training in evaluation, rural/urban nature of county, and county population. In general, those who appear most likely to utilize formal impact assessment techniques are program leaders/coordinators, represent Home Economics, have over 4 years service, have had training in evaluation, and are from an urban county of 250,000 or more population. It would appear that the practice of utilizing impact evaluation results in program accountability is a function of similar characteristics. Those adopting this practice appear more likely to be a County Extension Director, be trained in Home Economics, have over 10 years service, have had training in evaluation, and to be from urban counties over 100,000 in population.

Of those not yet adopting the above practices, only a small percentage indicated outright rejection. Most indicated being in earlier stages of the process, such as wanting to learn more about how to do the practice, evaluating its appropriateness and benefit, or testing the practice through trial implementation. Non-adopters tended to have a somewhat balanced distribution among these stages.

References

Bennett, Claude. 1976. Analyzing Impacts of Extension Programs. ESC-575. United States Department of Agriculture.

Rogers, Everett M., and F. Floyd Shoemaker, 1971. Communication of Innovations: A Cross-Cultural Approach (second edition). New York : Free Press.

APPENDIX A

Questionnaire on the Importance and Use of Impact Evaluations

1. Which of the following statements best describes your position relative to doing formal evaluations of the impact of your Extension programs?

> NOTE: A formal impact evaluation would typically consist of a set of questions asking about one or more of the following -- reactions to a program; change in knowledge, attitudes or skills; changes in practices; social or economic consequences of a program. The items would be organized into a questionnaire format and responses obtained through interview, mail survey, or questionnaires distributed at a meeting or gathering.

Please select only ONE statement, and circle the letter beside it.

*a. I am aware of the concept of evaluating Extension programs for impact, but I really haven't thought much about it and haven't done any formal evaluations of this nature.

*b. I am aware of the concept of evaluating Extension programs for impact, but I haven't done any evaluations of this nature. I am interested in learning more about it.

*c. I am aware of the concept of evaluating Extension programs for impact, but have not done any. I feel that I know enough to try one, or could get the help necessary, but am trying to determine in my own mind if it would be of sufficient benefit in my situation.

*d. I am aware of the concept of evaluating Extension programs for impact, but have not done any. I feel that I know enough to try one, or could get the help necessary, but I have decided that it would not be of sufficient benefit in my situation.

e. I have evaluated a program or two for impact, but I still haven't come to a final conclusion that it is all that beneficial.

f. I have evaluated a program or two for impact, and have come to the conclusion that impact evaluations are not of sufficient benefit in my situation.

g. I am evaluating my programs for impact whenever appropriate. I plan to continue to do formal evaluations as I have found the results to be beneficial.

> *If you circled items a, b, c, or d please go to item 7.

2. In your evaluation efforts what evidence have you attempted to collect? (circle the number beside all appropriate)

   1 Reactions to your program(s)

   2 Change in knowledge, skills, or attitudes

   3 Changes in what people do (practice change)

   4 Social or economic impacts (consequences) of the program(s)

3. Within the past two years, approximately how many formal evaluations or program impact have you done? _____

4. How does the number of formal impact evaluations that you have done in the past couple of years compare with the number you were doing prior to that time?

   1 MORE

   2 ABOUT THE SAME

   3 LESS ⟶ If LESS, why? _____

5. Now for information on <u>external accountability</u>. Which of the following statements best describes your position relative to using the results of impact evaluations for external accountability purposes?

   *a. I am aware of the concept of utilizing evaluation results for external accountability, but I haven't thought much about it and haven't really used the information in this manner.

   *b. I am aware of the concept of utilizing evaluation results for external accountability, and am trying to learn, or plan to learn, more of the specifics of how this can be effectively done.

   *c. I am aware of the concept of utilizing evaluation results for external accountability, although I have not done so. I feel that I know some ways of doing it, or can get help in this regard. But I am still trying to determine in my own mind if it would be that beneficial in my situation.

   *d. I am aware of the concept of utilizing evaluation results for external accountability, although I have not done so. I feel that I know some ways of doing it, or can get help in this regard. But, I have determined that it would not be that beneficial in my situation.

   e. I have used the results of impact evaluations in external accountability efforts on a few occasions. I still haven't come to a firm landing that it is that valuable or beneficial.

f. I have used the results of impact evaluations in external accountability efforts on a few occasions. I have decided that use of such information is not that beneficial in my situation.

g. I use evaluation results in my accountability efforts whenever appropriate and feel that it is valuable and beneficial.

*If you circled items a, b, c, or d please go to item 7.

6. With what external audiences have you used the data obtained from your impact evaluations?

1 Extension advisory committee(s)

2 County Administrator or Manager

3 County Commission

4 Reports to Specific Clients

5 General reports to the public

7. I am:

1 County Director

2 County Program Leader/Coordinator

3 County Extension Agent

8. My field is primarily:

1 Agriculture

2 Home Economics

3 4-H

4 Marine

9. I have been employed in Florida Extension:

1 Less than one year

2 1-3 years

3 4-10 years

4 Over 10 years

10. I have had inservice or formal training in evaluation:

1 YES → How recent?
   1 within past 3 years
   2 prior to 3 years ago
2 NO
3 DON'T RECALL

11. Type of county:

1 Largely Rural

2 Largely Urban

3 About Equal Rural/Urban

12. County Population

1 Under 25,000

2 25,000 to 99,999

3 100,000 to 250,000

4 Over 250,000